



**Dyce Academy  
Aberdeen City Council  
26 April 2011**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents<sup>1</sup>, young people and the local community know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. Where applicable there will also be a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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### **1. The school**

Dyce Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the suburb of Dyce in the north of Aberdeen and the surrounding rural area, including the villages of Newmachar and Kingseat in Aberdeenshire. It is the home of Aberdeen City Music School (ACMS), a national centre of excellence in music. There is a specialist (ASN) base for young people who have additional learning needs and a Mainstream Inclusion of Children on the Autistic Spectrum (MICAS) base. Places in the specialist bases are allocated by Aberdeen education service. The roll was 547, including 38 young people who attend the ACMS, when the inspection was carried out in March 2011. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2009/2010.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Teachers' commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.
- Effective collaboration with Bucksburn Academy which significantly enhances the senior school curriculum.
- The wide range of opportunities for young people to develop additional skills for life and work.
- The very high standard in performing skills of young people in the Aberdeen City Music School.

## **3. How well do young people learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Almost all young people are responsible and motivated to learn. Those in the MICAS base engage well in learning activities across the school. Young people in the ACMS are highly focused and work confidently. They engage very responsibly in demanding practice routines. Across the school, young people contribute confidently to classroom discussions and work very well together on tasks which develop their thinking skills. For example, young people at S3 enjoyed working out solutions together at a BP enterprise event. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to develop their collaborative skills. Overall, they need to make greater use of information and communications technology to enhance their learning. Teachers increasingly ask young people for their views on lessons but many young people would like more say in the way they learn. Although young people have started to evaluate their own progress, they are not always clear how to improve. They need to develop their skills as independent learners. Across the school, the majority of young people feel safe and almost all feel that good relationships with their teachers help them learn better.

Young people are developing confidence and social skills through a wide range of sporting and cultural activities. Those in the MICAS base grow in confidence and move on successfully to work or further study. In the ASN base, young people enjoy learning relevant skills through individualised programmes. As a result, their attendance has improved. Those enrolled in the ACMS perform to a very high standard at regional and national events. A number of young people are developing teamwork and leadership skills through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Across the school, many are learning to work effectively with others through participation in groups such as the eco group or Fair Trade group. The school has achieved Fair Trade status. Young people have developed a greater awareness of global citizenship through extensive charity fundraising as well as international visits and visitors. A number of young people, particularly those at S6, are developing as leaders through being buddies to younger pupils for example. There is scope to develop these skills in more young people, at all stages. The school has made good use of timetabled lessons to enable young people to achieve in different contexts. For example, almost all young people at S3 achieve a first aid qualification. Links with business partners have enabled those on extended work placements to learn useful employability skills. The school is aware that it now needs to explore how the range of achievements improves skills for learning. The school needs to celebrate success in all areas more effectively.

By the end of S2, the majority of young people attain appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Young people in the MICAS base are making good progress from prior levels of achievement. By the end of S4, results in national examinations are overall above national averages. By the end of S6, performance at Higher is in line with schools serving those with similar needs and backgrounds. In a few subjects at S5/S6, too many young people have not achieved an overall award. The school recently introduced a revised tracking system to monitor young people's progress better. Young people in the ASN base are developing good skills in literacy and numeracy which are helping them achieve more in other subject areas. Almost all those in the ACMS attain the highest levels in

national examinations, and achieve Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) awards at a very high level. Most young people move on to employment, training or other educational opportunities on leaving school.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

The school provides a broad general education. Young people are provided with an element of choice to enhance their overall learning experience. Staff have revised courses at S1 to take account of Curriculum for Excellence but are at the early stages of developing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across all subject areas. Departments recognise the need to build on young people's learning in primary school better. Young people in the MICAS base have a curriculum that is tailored to the specific needs of the individual, with an appropriate focus on communication. Staff need to ensure this links more directly to Curriculum for Excellence. At S3/S4, young people are developing useful life skills through a range of short courses such as photography. Almost all in S4 learn about the world of work through an effective work experience programme. At S4 and S5, the school successfully offers vocational opportunities through links with the local college and business partners. At S5/S6, very effective links with another local secondary school create more choice and opportunities. Young people in the ACMS benefit from a very high quality programme in performing but the programme for creativity needs to be improved. The school does not yet provide sufficient opportunities for physical education or religious observance.

Almost all teachers provide relevant tasks and activities which match the needs of learners. They provide good individual support during lessons. They ensure classes know what they have to learn and almost all encourage young people to assess their own progress and that of their peers. In most classes, the pace of work is appropriate although a few learners would benefit from more demanding work. Homework practice varies and tasks do not always move young people on in their learning. Support staff identify learners' needs effectively and give teachers useful strategies to support learners.

Learners with behaviour management issues would benefit from similar strategies to help them manage their own behaviour. Individual learning plans successfully identify ways of supporting the most vulnerable learners. Pupil support assistants work very effectively with teachers to ensure young people from the specialised bases join mainstream classes successfully. Individual support teams would achieve even more by building on the joint working already in place and adopting a more cohesive approach to supporting all learners. In the ACMS, young people thrive on individualised programme planning and extensive one to one teaching.

#### **4. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?**

Effective links with a range of partner agencies such as health professionals help young people achieve and feel cared for in school. Very good pastoral links with primary schools, including a residential experience in Cullen for P7 children, ensure that children settle into secondary school quickly. Good links with local businesses and agencies such as Voluntary Services Aberdeen develop young people's understanding of the world beyond school. Skills Development Scotland and local partners prepare young people successfully for moving on to employment or training. Young people are developing a better understanding of diversity through, for example, the school's links with a school in Kenya. The school works with parents through the very supportive Parent Association. The school handles the few complaints it receives appropriately and overall, parents are satisfied with the work of the school. A few would like better communication links, and more say in the work of the school.

#### **5. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?**

Pupil councils and groups such as the eco group give young people the opportunity to air their views. Many feel the school does not act on those views. Many staff run clubs and other activities to broaden

young people's interests. Almost all staff are involved in working groups which have started to take forward key aspects of learning such as health promotion. Staff now need to be more involved in sharing best practice in teaching and learning, as well as leading professional development sessions. The headteacher has introduced a number of important processes to find out how well the school is doing and to engage staff in school improvement. These changes have begun to make a difference. Self-evaluation processes now need to be refined and extended to all areas of the school, including the specialist provisions, to ensure greater impact on learning.

## **6. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?**

Almost all young people are pleasant, polite, and supportive of each other. Most feel they are treated fairly. The authority is currently reviewing security arrangements in the building to ensure all young people feel safe. The school promotes diversity successfully through the curriculum and events such as European language week. The school has taken effective steps to promote positive attitudes to health and wellbeing. Overall, young people behave well but staff need to use agreed strategies to promote positive behaviour more consistently across the school. Most young people work hard but staff need to encourage them to have higher aspirations. Young people in the ACMS respond very well to high expectations of their attitude and commitment. Across the whole school, almost all young people and staff are proud of the school and its achievements.

## **7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?**

The headteacher, along with the senior management team, has introduced a number of key initiatives to improve the work of the school. A strong focus on improving teaching and learning has had a positive impact on the classroom experience. The headteacher involves staff in school improvement and encourages them to lead initiatives such as the highly successful Transform theatre project. Faculty heads are very positive about their role in raising expectations and achievement in young people. Their role in taking forward other

whole-school initiatives is not yet clear. The school has recently undergone a number of developments and staffing changes. A number of staff feel that leadership across the school could be more effective and they are uncertain about the school's vision for the future. The headteacher now needs to take steps to address these concerns. The headteacher and senior management team are aware of the need to review the school's aims with staff, parents and partners to agree their key priorities for development. The headteacher should then communicate this vision for the school to all staff, including those in specialist areas, to ensure that all share a common sense of purpose.

## **8. What happens next?**

We are confident that, with support from the education authority, the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Working with all staff and stakeholders, develop a shared understanding of the school's vision and priorities for success.
- Continue to work towards a culture of high expectations.
- Develop a more coordinated approach to the delivery of the whole range of pupil support.
- Consolidate and build upon links with parents and other partners.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Dyce Academy.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>good</b>

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>

**HM Inspector:** Fiona A Pate  
26 April 2011

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

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